

# **CUTTING EDGE CAMELOT, No 233**

## **Advent Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2023**

**‘Virtually Church but with some way to go...’**

### **Welcome**

Welcome to Cutting Edge Camelot this Advent Sunday.

### **Scripture Passage**

*Mark 13: 24-37*

“But in those days, after that suffering,

the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light,

<sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven,

and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

<sup>26</sup> “Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

<sup>28</sup> “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

<sup>32</sup> “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup> It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

<sup>35</sup> “Therefore, keep awake - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn,  
<sup>36</sup> or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

## **Reflection**

Some books of the Old Testament- Isaiah and Daniel come to mind - give visions of the Apocalypse - the end of the world. And their visions are on a cosmic level, with the whole universe collapsing, the sky falling, and even if we bear in mind that the knowledge they had of the universe was pretty limited, and their universe was a lot smaller than ours, it still comes over as seriously scary. God gave his prophets the words to speak and write, but he wasn't giving them lessons in astrophysics, he was giving them images they could understand and relate to. Can we imagine stars actually falling, now we know they aren't tiny, and not stuck in the sky, which was the way people thousands of years ago saw them? So can we accept that we're dealing with picture language - God's picture language - and not take it literally?

It's important to look at Bible passages in the context of the time they were written. For example, Isaiah and Daniel were both writing for the Jews in exile in Babylon, who thought God had lost interest in them. Isaiah wrote to give them hope, reminded them that Babylon wouldn't last forever - nothing does. God's justice may take its time, but the humble will get theirs, the oppressed will be free, so there is no need to be afraid.

So there are really three things going on in this Gospel reading. Jesus has been talking about the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, as part of the Roman response to a serious uprising, and the horrors that would come upon his people. But now he widens these prophecies out, and talks about the end of all things - cosmic upheaval, and his return, which he refers to as the coming of the Son of Man. But as nobody knows when this will be, he

warns us all to be ready to meet him, and we will certainly meet him when we die.

When I was curate in the Forest of Dean, I knew an elderly man called Bill. He had cancer, and I went to see him as often as I could. We were poking his bonfire with sticks one afternoon, and I asked him, "Are you afraid of dying?"

"No," he said, "I be going to see Jesus, and I ain't afraid of him." Before I could answer, he went on, "Besides, dying's nothing. You just feel a bit stiff the day after." I've cherished that for forty years. Some people never face up to the fact of their mortality, but with his faith in Jesus, Bill did. And there are still people who think making a will is being morbid, so they put it off.

We have to look at this collection of Jesus' sayings about the inevitability of death and judgement. People in Jerusalem were proud of the temple - one of the great buildings of the world then - and Jesus told them it would be destroyed, completely. Jesus' disciples clearly saw the Temple as a fixture in the landscape, and couldn't imagine it not being there. "When will this happen?" they asked. Think of our iconic buildings, like the Houses of Parliament, or our own Wells Cathedral. It's hard to imagine them being completely demolished. And Jesus told them, "Not yet" - there would be wars and natural disasters, because there always are; his followers would be persecuted, and then heathen idols *would* be set up in the temple itself. Then Jesus went on to talk about the coming of the Son of Man, and this is the bit that gives us trouble. After describing the stars falling, the sun going out and all of space collapsing, Jesus said all this would happen in the lifetimes of the people he was with. The temple was certainly destroyed within the lifetime of his hearers, forty years after his death and resurrection, but Jesus didn't actually appear in the clouds in their lifetime, and two thousand years later, he still hasn't. Every generation since has wondered if Jesus meant *their* lifetimes, as if they were hearing Jesus

speaking to them through the words of the Bible, but it still hasn't happened. We would have noticed.

It makes more sense if you can believe that Jesus was talking about the *then* and the *now*, not a distant future. Then, the complacency of his people was shattered by the destruction of the temple. That was maybe God's judgement on their arrogance - his way of saying he wasn't to be shut up in a building, approached through priests, but set free, to be wherever his people were. The old religion, based on sacrifices and temple rituals was gone forever. And now, Jesus comes to each one of us in a heavenly, spiritual way when we die, and that could be any time. So forgive me for mentioning it, but we have to be ready to die whenever God calls us - don't leave your preparations too late. Make peace with God and your neighbours, right now. It's two years next week since I lost Pam. But Pam was ready to die. She said she knew where she was going, and who she was going to meet, and I was so impressed by her calm and courage. I didn't weep when she died, only when I realised I couldn't care for her any more, and as she put it, handed her over to the professionals, and of course, to God.

A lot of old tombs have skulls carved on - you see them on memorials in churches, too, and they were put there in a less squeamish age than ours to remind people of the inevitability of death.

But when we have the Christian hope of heaven, then death is no big deal - as my friend Bill pointed out.

Advent is a time when we prepare to celebrate the coming of Jesus into the world the first time, as a human baby. For most, Christmas has become mostly a secular, midwinter festival, which we would still need, even if it wasn't for the birth of Jesus. And of course, it's a huge commercial season. More Advent than Advent. But in Christian terms, Advent is supposed to be when we look forward to Jesus' return. We maybe push this to the back of

our minds, but it's there in the scriptures, that one day, in his own time, Jesus will come back, and we need to be ready to receive him. Meanwhile, he is there to receive us, at the end of our lives, so we need to be ready to meet him then.

Charles Dickens' classic *A Christmas Carol* is about "keeping Christmas" as a time of generosity, of caring for the poor and needy, of goodwill and kindness. The word "God" appears in it just once, the name of Jesus not at all. For most people, it will be a time of food and parties, presents and greetings, family gatherings and cheer. And that's all great. But in all the preparation for Christmas, however you mean to keep it, make God the centre, Jesus the focus.

*Ron*

## **Points for Prayers**

- Being ready to meet Jesus
- Preparations for Christmas and the people we will meet over this season
- Weather warnings
- For Israel, Gaza and the Middle East
- Ongoing war in the Ukraine
- Climate change following COP 28
- Those whom we know who are facing illnesses of all kinds and have recently been bereaved
- For Elliscombe House in Higher Holton and its residents
- For teachers and children of North Cadbury church school as they prepare to celebrate Christmas with a Christingle and carol service on 6<sup>th</sup> December

## Hymn

A traditional Advent hymn is 'Lo, he comes with clouds descending.'

## Services for this week and next

Sunday 3 <sup>rd</sup> December	9.00 am Communion, Yarlington
Sunday 3 <sup>rd</sup> December	9.30 am Camelot Matins, North Cheriton
Sunday 3 <sup>rd</sup> December	11.00 am Advent Carols, North Cadbury
Sunday 10 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Communion, Galhampton
Sunday 10 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Communion, North Cheriton
Sunday 10 <sup>th</sup> December	9.30 am Matins, Blackford
Sunday 10 <sup>th</sup> December	11.00 am Patronal Sunday Worship, Holton
Sunday 10 <sup>th</sup> December	4.00 pm Carol Service, South Cadbury

## Excalibur

Excalibur is back in paper form. It contains details of Camelot people, a record of baptisms, weddings and funerals undertaken through the church in the Camelot Parishes. The December and January edition of Excalibur has now been published online at [camelotparishes.co.uk](http://camelotparishes.co.uk).

## The Parish Office

If Rob is not in the Office during normal office hours please contact him via email ([office@camelotparishes.org.uk](mailto:office@camelotparishes.org.uk)) or on 01749 850934.

*Growing as a worshipper, a servant and a family*

*We pray that 'we might live in love,  
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us'*

(Ephesians 5: 2)